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Intelligence

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A Higher Soviet Profile in Lebanon [REDACTED]

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An Intelligence Assessment

~~Secret~~
July 1988
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A Higher Soviet Profile in Lebanon [REDACTED] b3

An Intelligence Assessment



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**A Higher Soviet Profile
in Lebanon** b3

Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 1 July 1988
was used in this report.*

The Soviet Union has sought to play a significantly greater role in Lebanon since the major Israeli and US foreign policy reversals there in 1983 and 1984. The Israeli invasion in June 1982 decimated the PLO military presence, which up to that time was almost the exclusive object of Soviet interest in Lebanon. The PLO's problems, Israel's inability to force a settlement in Lebanon, and US setbacks in brokering a solution prompted the Soviets to try their hand at building influence with competing Lebanese factions. b3

General Secretary Gorbachev has continued this initiative; since the dispatch of a new, activist ambassador to Beirut in May 1986, Moscow has expanded its contacts with most of the major factions active in Lebanon today, including some that are hostile to its primary Arab ally, Syria. In what could be the most significant of these openings, the Soviets have established contacts with the Christian elements in Lebanon—previously ignored as staunchly pro-Western—probably to enhance Moscow's credentials as a player with access to all major factions. b3

Expanding contacts with a range of Lebanese factions provides Moscow opportunities to enhance its image as a reliable friend of various confessional and political movements in Lebanon. More important, such relations allow the Soviets to hedge their bets in the volatile Lebanese arena as a means to ensure a secure foothold. The wider range of contacts also contributes to the Soviet objective of promoting a Palestinian presence in Lebanon. b3

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[REDACTED] Moscow probably is also motivated by concerns about the security of its personnel in Beirut. The Soviets probably believe that maintaining good relations with the competing Lebanese factions will help prevent Soviet personnel from replacing Westerners as targets for terrorists. b3

Moscow appears increasingly willing to risk disagreements with Syria over Lebanon, particularly regarding the presence of Palestinians in Beirut and southern Lebanon and the efforts of Damascus to extend its control over the PLO. The Soviets have long opposed a Syrian-controlled Lebanon because it probably would enhance Syria's ability to operate independent of Moscow's interests and threaten the independence of another Soviet ally—the PLO. They are keenly aware, however, of the importance

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Greater influence in Lebanon would enhance the legitimacy of

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Contents

	Page
Key Judgments	iii
Strains With Syria	1
Increasing Contacts: A Finger in Every Pie	3
The Government	4
The Christian Community	5
The Maronite Element	5
The Lebanese Forces	5
Moscow's Allies	7
The Druze	7
The Communists	8
The Palestinians	9
Syria's Ally, Amal	9
Hizballah: Little Contact	10
UNIFIL: A Reversal in Soviet Policy	11
Outlook	12

v

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A Higher Soviet Profile in Lebanon ~~XXXX~~ b3

Before the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the Soviet Embassy in Beirut focused almost exclusively on the Palestinian presence there rather than on bilateral Soviet-Lebanese relations.

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~~XXXX~~ When the main forces of the PLO were driven out of the country by the Israelis and the Syrians in 1982 and 1983, however, Moscow was left with only its severely weakened Lebanese Communist and Druze allies. Moreover, the USSR's reputation was badly tarnished by the Israeli defeat of Moscow's Syrian and Palestinian allies. Since then, the Soviets appear to be taking advantage of Syria's current political and economic difficulties by making contact with Lebanese groups that are hostile to Damascus—Moscow's most important ally in the Middle East. ~~XXXX~~ b3

Strains With Syria

Soviet policy in Lebanon is sharply constrained by the overriding importance of the Soviet-Syrian relationship. Lebanon was administratively a part of greater Syria until 1918 and Damascus still sees it as vital to Syrian political, economic, and strategic interests. Damascus is determined that any government in Lebanon be responsive to its political dictates and, at a minimum, that Lebanon not become a base for subversion against the Syrian regime. In spite of bilateral problems between Damascus and Moscow and sometimes directly conflicting priorities in Lebanon, Moscow is not likely to jeopardize its relations with Damascus over the Lebanese morass.

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Since 1984, however, and particularly under General Secretary Gorbachev, Moscow has been increasingly willing to pressure Assad and promote its own policy

and contacts independently of Damascus when Syrian and Soviet interests have been directly opposed—specifically regarding the PLO presence in Lebanon.

~~XXXX~~ continues to urge the factions to work together without external involvement. ~~XXXX~~ b3

Soviet dissatisfaction with Syrian policy in Lebanon—particularly regarding Syrian-backed efforts to extend control over the PLO—has been the subject of several messages and letters from Gorbachev to President Assad since 1985. ~~XXXX~~

~~XXXX~~
Moscow did not strongly support either the failed Syrian-sponsored Tripartite Accord in 1985—which aimed at increasing Muslim power at the expense of Christian dominance in Lebanon—or the Syrian security plan under which Syrian troops reentered and began patrolling Beirut in July 1986. The Soviets did support the Syrian move into Beirut in February 1987. ~~XXXX~~

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Lebanon: Militias and Confessional Factions

We estimate that, thus far, there have been over 140,000 fatalities, and almost a third of the population has been displaced or wounded as a result of the 13-year civil war in Lebanon. The trend toward a de facto partition of the country is well under way and appears irreversible. The principal Lebanese and Palestinian players continue to jockey to strengthen their political positions and remain unwilling to negotiate a truce. [REDACTED] b3

The Christians. Lebanon's Christian community remains opposed to sharing the primary political power vested in it by the French based on the 1933 census that gave it numerical superiority. It is itself, however, caught in a growing factional battle between President Gemayel and the more militant leader of the Christian Lebanese Forces militia, Samir JaJa. Until recently the two were linked in a partnership of convenience against Syrian influence, but JaJa now appears determined to achieve preeminence, adding yet another dangerous and unpredictable element to the Lebanese political scene. Other members of the Christian community, such as former President Sleiman Franjiyyah, maintain longstanding ties to the Syrian regime. The smaller Christian groups, including the Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholics, play less influential roles in current Lebanese politics. [REDACTED] b3

The Shia. Lebanon's Shia community is the largest segment of Lebanon's population and historically its most downtrodden. It is being courted by both the pro-Iranian fundamentalist Hizballah and the more secularist Syrian-supported Amal movements. The established representative of the Shia community,

Amal, and its leader Nabih Barri have been plagued by leadership struggles, battles against the Palestinian presence in Lebanon, and the growing appeal of the Iranian-backed radical Islamic faction, Hizballah. Hizballah's relative wealth and visible anti-Israeli activity are severely challenging Amal's popularity even in its established stronghold in South Lebanon. [REDACTED] b3

The Druze. The smallest, but most cohesive, of the major confessional groups, the Druze remain dominant in the Ash Shuf mountains southeast of Beirut. Since the Syrian intervention into West Beirut in February 1987, the Druze militia—the Progressive Socialist Party—has lost momentum. Druze leader Wulid Junblatt is balancing relationships with Syria, the USSR, Libya, and Iran in an attempt to secure more political and financial support. [REDACTED] b3

The Sunni. Unlike other sects in Lebanon, the Sunni have not developed a broad-based political or military organization to defend their interests. Historically given significant political stature, they are now moribund in Lebanese politics. The Sunni population is concentrated in Tripoli, Beirut, and Sidon. [REDACTED] b3

The Palestinians. The Israeli invasion and occupation of Lebanon in June 1982 eventually forced an evacuation of PLO fighters from Lebanon. Some PLO fighters have since returned to both Beirut and the South. We estimate that about 10,000 Palestinian fighters are currently in Lebanon, and approximately 1,000 are reinfilitrated annually, aided by the Christians and the Druze. [REDACTED] b3

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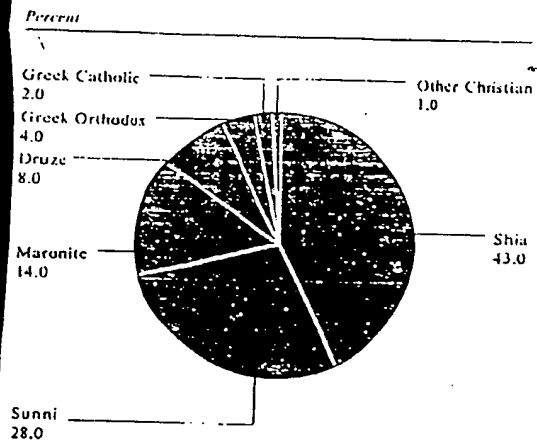
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Figure 1
Estimated Confessional Composition
of Lebanon's Population, 1988



increasingly unpopular among the Lebanese and Palestinians. In spring 1988 when Syria massed troops in West Beirut to intimidate the Iranian-backed Hizballah, the Soviets refrained from public support or criticism. The Kremlin may have determined it has more room for maneuvering in Lebanon now, given Damascus' bleak economic situation. b3

Increasing Contacts: A Finger in Every Pie

In May 1986 Vasiliy Ivanovich Kolotusha replaced Aleksandr Soldatov, who had served as the Soviet Ambassador to Lebanon since 1974. b3

For the Soviets, maintaining contacts with all Lebanese

Publicly, Soviet support for the Syrian presence in Lebanon will probably continue to be lukewarm, particularly as the Syrian military presence becomes

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Figure 2. A Lebanese guard outside wall built in front of Soviet Embassy in Beirut to stop suicide car bombers. b3

factions is a means of hedging their bets in the volatile Lebanese arena and ensuring a foothold in any possible outcome. It also provides Moscow an opportunity to enhance the Soviet image in Lebanon and abroad as a reliable friend of various confessional and political movements. The downside, however, is that each group in Lebanon is struggling for survival, security, and power; broader regional issues are important to these actors only as secondary objectives. Moscow is thus placed in the precarious position of protecting its own relations and prestige among groups with diametrically opposed interests. b3

The Government

The Soviets have made some progress in bilateral relations with the Christian-dominated Lebanese Government under President Amin Gemayel, which sees contacts with the USSR as another hedge against Syrian dominance. Beirut has publicly acknowledged that the USSR has an important role to play in the Middle East and endorsed Moscow's call for an international conference on the Arab-Israeli dispute. Moscow and Beirut signed minor arms deals in the 1960s and 1970s for light arms. b3

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that the Soviets have expressed particular interest in the 1988 Lebanese presidential election (due to be held between 23 July and 23 September), apparently accepting that the presidency should continue to be held by a Maronite Christian as dictated by the unwritten National Charter.

The Christian Community

Moscow has significantly expanded its contacts with the Christian community. The politically dominant Lebanese Christians have traditionally been Western oriented and have ties to Israel, and, as a consequence, most official Soviet contact in Lebanon previously has been with Muslim leaders. Until Ambassador Kolotusha's arrival, the Soviets made only occasional courtesy calls on key Christian figures such as former presidents Chamoun and the Syrian-backed Franjiyyah, and maintained infrequent contact with the Christian militias in East Beirut. More recently, however, Kolotusha has held unprecedented meetings with such anti-Syrian leaders as Lebanese Forces Commander Samir JaJa and Phalange Party President Georges Saade. In addition, [REDACTED]

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the Soviets are now offering to Christians half of the Soviet scholarships for Lebanese students, whereas they had previously granted 70 percent to Muslim students. [REDACTED]

By cultivating these anti-Syrian factions, the Soviets improve their own standing in Lebanon relative to Damascus, which is particularly important as the Syrian troop presence becomes increasingly unpopular. [REDACTED]

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The Maronite Element. Because the unwritten National Charter requires the president of the country to be a Maronite Christian,^{*} this segment of the Lebanese population—though divided among itself—is highly influential.

[REDACTED]

Kolotusha's main point

has been the Soviet proposal for an international conference on the Arab-Israeli dispute and the advantages to be gained for Lebanon by full Soviet participation in such a conference. [REDACTED]

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In October 1987, Maronite Patriarch Sfeir, the head of the Lebanese Maronite Church, traveled to the Soviet Union in the first such visit by a member of the Maronite clergy. [REDACTED]

the Patriarch was received with full honors during his weeklong visit, and met with both church and state officials, who assured him of Soviet commitment to an independent Lebanon and the proposed international conference on the Arab-Israeli dispute. Encouraged by these meetings, [REDACTED]

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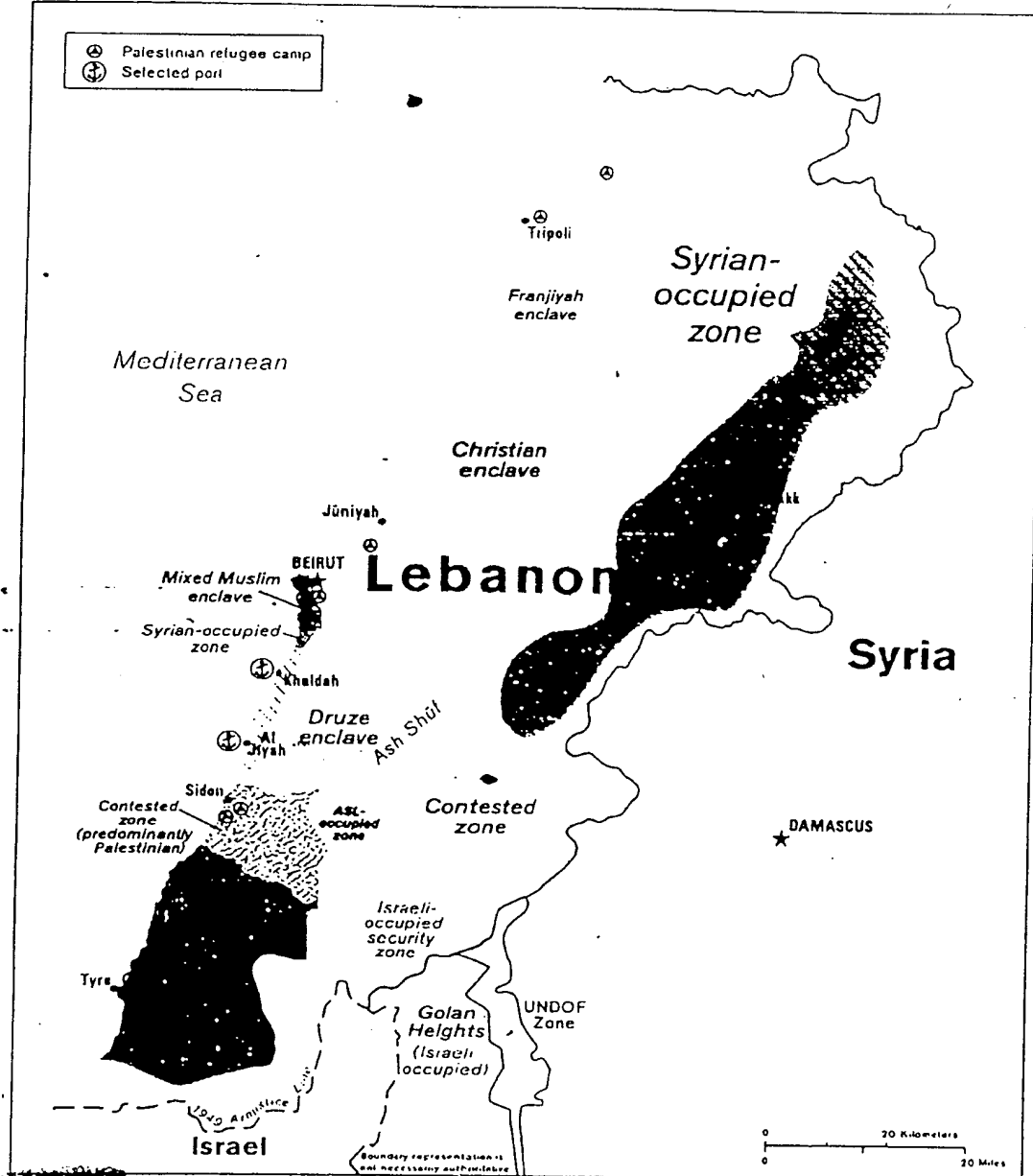
The Lebanese Forces. The anti-Syrian Lebanese Forces (LF) militia, the largest armed militia in Christian East Beirut, had not been known to be in contact with the Soviets in Lebanon until Ambassador Kolotusha arrived in Beirut in May 1986. Several short but unprecedented meetings and exchanges took place in the summer of 1986, and more frequent

^{*} The Maronites are the largest sect in the Christian community. They broke with the Byzantine church in 680 AD and subsequently migrated to the Mount Lebanon area in central Lebanon. They recognized the primacy of the Pope in Rome in the 12th century but have retained much autonomy. [REDACTED]

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Figure 3
The Partition of Lebanon, June 1988

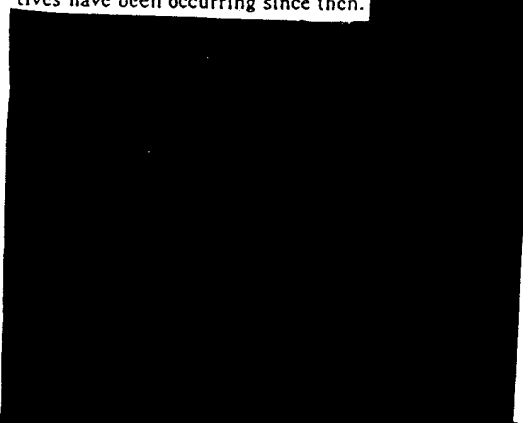


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meetings between LF officers and Soviet representatives have been occurring since then.



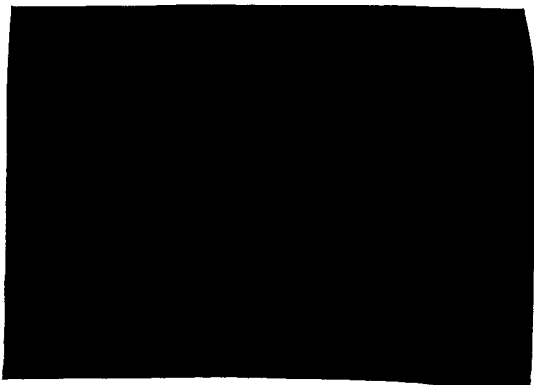
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Figure 4. Everyday life in Beirut is a constant threat of violence. b3

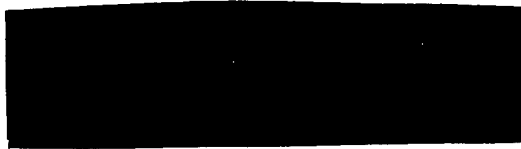
Moscow's Allies

*The Druze.*¹ The secular leftist Druze Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) is one of the USSR's closest and most reliable friends in the country, although it has not played a major role in Lebanese politics in the past. PSP leader Walid Junblatt is nervous about being excluded in any nationwide political negotiations—especially any Syrian-brokered deals—and therefore has turned to Moscow for military and political insurance. b3



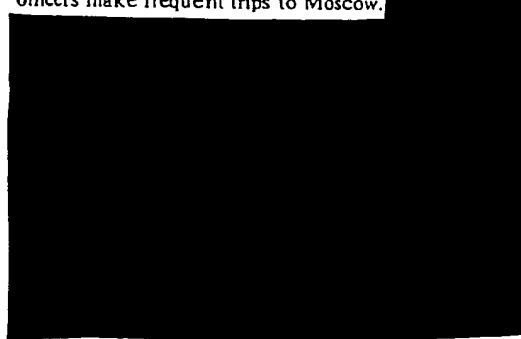
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¹ The Druze are the smallest of the major confessional groups in Lebanon. They derive from a sect of the Shia. They have a long history of conflict with the Maronites. b3



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Druze officials continue to meet regularly with Soviet Embassy officers, and Druze political and militia officers make frequent trips to Moscow.



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Junblatt, whose father was assassinated by the Syrians, has repeatedly asked the Soviets for protection from assassination threats and to intercede with Syria on the PSP's behalf when the Syrians have withheld Soviet military shipments and when tensions between the PSP and Amal have threatened to erupt in

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violence. When pressed, Moscow has generally deferred to Damascus, telling Junblatt that he must work things out with the Syrians himself. At the same time, the Soviets have made it clear to Damascus that they regard the PSP as an important friend and that the Syrians should deal carefully with the Druze.

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The Druze seem to recognize their limited importance in the Soviet scheme of things. On his return from a seminar in Moscow in November 1987 in connection with the 70th anniversary celebrations of the Russian Revolution, Junblatt told reporters that the Lebanese problem and Palestinian issue "unintentionally or purposely" were not on the agenda for discussions because these problems were not considered "pivotal" issues.

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The Communists. Moscow continues to assign high priority to the small Lebanese Communist Party (LCP),¹ giving it extensive political and educational

¹ The LCP is pro-Moscow and opposed to continued Maronite political domination in Lebanon. Founded in the 1920s, it was banned under the French mandate and not legalized until 1970. Its members are predominantly Greek Orthodox by origin.

83

support and the same type of military support granted the Druze. The LCP, led by George Hawi since 1979, has a reported membership of about 3,000. Although comparatively small, the LCP has one of the better trained and effective militias in Lebanon. The importance Moscow places on its relationship with the LCP is clear from the attendance of Karen Brutents, deputy chief of the CPSU Central Committee's International Department and the party's top Middle East expert, at the February 1987 LCP Congress, in spite of rapidly deteriorating security conditions in Lebanon.

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Figure 5. Lebanese Communist Party militiamen in front of their party's emblem. b3

Ambassador Kolotusha is an expert in Palestinian affairs, and, with the return of the PLO to Beirut and southern Lebanon, it is likely that Moscow's policy will continue to focus on the Palestinian presence there. The Soviet Union and its East European allies back the PLO with political support, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] for which the PLO pays in hard currency. b3

not a major force. [REDACTED]

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Syria's Ally, Amal

The relationship between Syrian-backed Amal* and the Soviet Union has existed only since 1984. Since then, the Soviets have steadily increased their efforts to cultivate friendly ties to the group. Since the summer of 1985, when Amal opened an office in Moscow and Amal leader Nabih Barri visited the USSR, the Soviets apparently have been gradually working toward establishing stronger relations with the less radical (compared with the Iranian-backed Hizballah) Lebanese Shia community, which Amal represents. [REDACTED]

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The Palestinians. Moscow has long supported the presence of Palestinian fighters in Lebanon, their last base for independent operations against Israel. From Moscow's perspective, support for the Palestinians lends credibility to Soviet claims to a major role in the Arab-Israeli peace process. Moreover, a PLO military presence in Lebanon, independent of Syria or Jordan, provides Moscow with a greater opportunity to influence this organization. b3

*This movement transformed the politically quiescent Shia community when founded in 1975, has campaigned for government reforms to increase Shia participation and is relatively secularist. The Shia, who are the second-largest Islamic sect worldwide, now form the largest sect in Lebanon. Long the most economically deprived of Lebanon's confessional groups, the Shia have migrated to Beirut in great numbers since the mid-1970s. They have been increasingly torn between fundamentalist and secularist tendencies. The Sunni have traditionally formed the Muslim establishment in Lebanon but now are outnumbered by the Shia and, unlike other sects, the Sunni never developed a broad-based political or military organization to defend their interests. b3

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Barri visited Moscow again in the summer of 1986, and Ambassador Kolotusha held regular meetings—focused mainly on Amal-Palestinian fighting—with Amal officials throughout 1987, according to press reporting.

Soviet support for Amal, however, is tempered by its sharply different position toward the Palestinians in Lebanon. While the Soviets support Yasir Arafat's leadership of the PLO and favor a Palestinian presence in Lebanon, the Amal leadership—largely under Syrian direction—has been working to undermine Arafat and remove the armed Palestinian presence from Beirut and southern Lebanon.

criticized Amal's role in the late 1986 to early 1987 fighting against the Palestinians and against the Druze and Lebanese Communists in February 1987, but supported Barri's ultimately successful attempts in the fall of 1987 that ended the Palestinian camps war.

Despite Amal's current weakened state caused by battles with the more radical Iranian-backed Hizballah, its prolonged campaign against Palestinians in the camps wars, and actions against other longstanding Soviet friends—including the Druze and the LCP—the Soviets probably will continue to work to improve their relationship with this moderate Shia group. Moscow greatly prefers the moderate Shia Amal to the radical Hizballah, and will probably continue to try to shore up Amal to prevent a further erosion of the group's popular base by these radical Islamic fundamentalists.

Hizballah: Little Contact

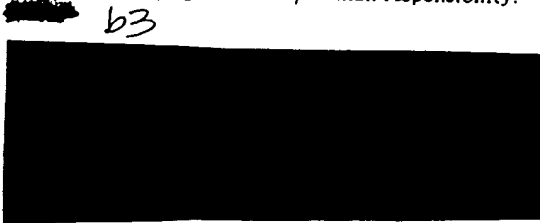
Even though the Soviets have been expanding their relations with most of the key elements in Lebanon, their physical security in Beirut remains precarious, and the radical Shia group Hizballah, backed largely by Iran, is still Moscow's main security concern.

Hizballah, which means the Party of God, is an umbrella organization for several fundamentalist pro-Iranian Shia groups and militias. It emerged after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and advocates the founding of an Islamic republic in Lebanon.



Figure 6. A Druze T-54 tank takes position outside of the walled Soviet Embassy after four Soviets were kidnaped and threats received on 4 October 1985. b3

Ambassador Kolotusha made scathing comments about Hizballah, describing it as a fanatical organization peopled by men "from another planet." The Soviet Ambassador said he believes that all of the foreign hostages in Lebanon are under Hizballah control and that the various names used by organizations claiming responsibility for the kidnappings are reflections of one organization guided by Hizballah. The Soviet military newspaper *Krasnaya zvezda* reported in March 1987 that Anglican Church Envoy Terry Waite was being held in the Iranian Embassy, implying Hizballah/Iranian responsibility.



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The Soviet Hostage Crisis

On 30 September 1985, three Soviet diplomats and one Soviet physician were kidnaped in West Beirut by Sunni Islamic fundamentalists, probably aligned with the radical Shia Hizballah, who demanded Soviet intervention to stop Syrian operations in Tripoli aimed at eliminating Sunni influence and imposing Damascus' Tripartite Security Plan. On 2 October, one of the diplomats was murdered, prompting the Soviets to issue an official government statement calling the act unpardonable and demanding the "immediate and unconditional" release of the remaining three victims. [REDACTED] b3

but declined to comment on who had kidnaped them or how they were freed. Following the incident, the Soviets cut their personnel, evacuated dependents, tightened security around their West Beirut chancery, and significantly reduced their financial and commercial activities in Beirut. Aeroflot stopped its regular weekly flights to Beirut at the time, not resuming them again until August 1986 as a "tangible result," [REDACTED] of the improved security situation resulting from the implementation of the Syrian security plan in Beirut. Aeroflot again stopped service to Beirut in January 1987, when Beirut International Airport was closed because of factional fighting, and, although the airport reopened in March 1987, Aeroflot only resumed service in late 1987. [REDACTED] b3

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Moscow remains concerned about the security of its personnel in Beirut. [REDACTED] Ambassador Kolotusha spoke with emotion about the October 1985 hostage incident, claiming that the Soviet diplomat who was executed had been "slaughtered." The Soviet Ambassador stated that, although spouses are now permitted to accompany Soviet diplomats to Beirut, no children are allowed and that one of his biggest problems is keeping the Soviet Embassy staffed with the absolute minimum necessary to accomplish the Embassy's tasks. [REDACTED] b3

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The three Soviet hostages were released on 30 October 1985. A Soviet Embassy spokesman in Beirut confirmed that the hostages were freed on that date.

UNIFIL: A Reversal in Soviet Policy

Indicative of Moscow's greater activism and realism in Lebanon is its about-face on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which polices areas of southern Lebanon near the Israeli border. For the first time, the Soviets voted in May 1986 to

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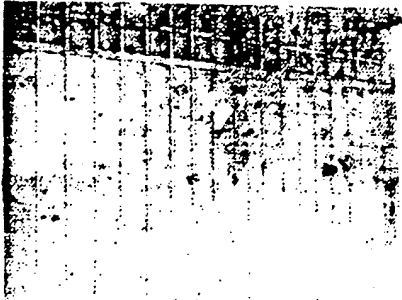


Figure 7. Bullet holes in front gate of Soviet Embassy. b3

support the UNIFIL mandate. They continue to do so in the semiannual vote to renew the mandate and have paid their UNIFIL assessment. Moscow's reversal of eight years of opposition to UNIFIL was part of a broader Soviet effort under Gorbachev to gain greater influence within the UN organization, to improve the image of the USSR in the global arena, and to garner support for Soviet proposals for the settlement of regional conflicts. The move probably was also partly inspired by a desire to embarrass the United States for withholding its UN payments in general. b3

In addition to these broader considerations, however, Soviet goals in Lebanon probably weighed heavily in the about-face on UNIFIL. b3

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The Soviets probably view UNIFIL as a constraint on Israeli incursions into Lebanon, which are a distraction to the radical Shia in southern Lebanon, and, by supporting it, they are filling another gap created by decreasing Western involvement in Lebanon. b3

Outlook

Given the lessons learned from Western setbacks in Lebanon, Syria's vital interests in Lebanon, the fighting between Moscow's local clients, and the continued threat of Israeli incursions, Soviet policy options in

Lebanon appear to be limited. Any bold course of action tied to a specific party or coalition carries the potential for precipitating a new crisis. While the Soviets will try to improve their position among the various elements and will work to fill the vacuum left by the receding Israeli and Western presence, they will try to avoid replacing Israel and the West as a high-visibility target for Lebanese radicals. b3

We do not believe Moscow has sufficient influence with the warring parties either to enforce a resolution of the internal Lebanese conflict or to manipulate events significantly. The Soviets nevertheless may try to boost their own prestige within Lebanon and throughout the Arab world by continuing to seek a role in negotiations between the warring factions—especially with the approach of the late summer 1988 election. Moscow almost certainly will continue to support a Palestinian presence in Lebanon as part of its broader regional policy agenda, and will continue to urge a genuine reconciliation between Assad and Arafat and to end Syrian efforts to circumscribe the Palestinian presence in Lebanon. b3

A
partitioned Lebanon probably best serves Soviet interests because the strong Islamic elements and the Christian's traditional ties to the West probably would otherwise keep Lebanon out of the Soviet camp. In a Lebanon that remained cantonized, however, areas controlled by pro-Soviet militias would continue to serve as influential Soviet footholds. b3

Should Lebanon dissolve into a set of autonomous cantons—with the Christians in the north, the Shia in the Al Biqa' (Bekaa) and the South, the Druze in the Ash Shuf, and the Palestinians along the Southern coast—the Soviets probably would attempt to maintain good relations with all parties and would continue to provide military equipment to their longstanding friends to maintain the status quo. Such a scenario is not dramatically different from the current situation

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and would pose the same difficult problems for Moscow. Factional fighting, radical activity, and the threat of Israeli and Syrian incursions would continue to absorb much of Moscow's attention in Lebanon. ~~██████████~~ b3

In the far less likely event that the Lebanese themselves were able to form some sort of stable government, the Kremlin would jockey for a strong position vis-a-vis the West through its Lebanese friends. Moscow could live with a nonaligned Lebanon, but would attempt to play a spoiler role if such a government appeared to be turning to the West and to Israel. ~~██████████~~ b3

If Assad decided to commit Syrian forces on a large enough scale to pacify Lebanon—that is, force the armed Palestinians out of the country, tame Hizballah, and intimidate the Lebanese militias into acquiescence—Moscow probably would grudgingly accept the situation because it would have no alternative. Although the Kremlin does not want to see a Syrian-controlled Lebanon, its relations with Damascus—its most important ally in the Middle East—are more important than Soviet investments in the ever-shifting political scene in Beirut. The Soviets probably would give lukewarm support to the Syrian position in Lebanon, while quietly continuing to support the LCP, the Druze, and the Palestinians in an effort to bolster the Soviet position in the country. ~~██████████~~ b3

The Soviets are attempting to ensure through their aid to a variety of factions in Lebanon that whatever group or coalition that gains sway will be hostile to US interests. As the Soviets become more actively involved in Lebanon, however, Soviet-Syrian strains are likely to increase, possibly opening opportunities to improve the US position with the Syrians. ~~██████████~~ b3

Although Gorbachev has sought US-Soviet cooperation on regional issues as a major component of his foreign policy, there is no evidence that this extends to the internal Lebanese problem. The Soviets in Beirut flaunt their mobility and freedom of action in contrast to the strict security precautions to which Americans must adhere. The Soviets in Lebanon have finessed their own posture toward various groups, adopting the US stance toward the Christians—that is, supporting the continuation of Christian dominance of the presidency—while continuing to support the Muslims and Druze in their quest for a more balanced government. Furthermore, by maintaining contacts with all factions the Soviets can claim to be best positioned as an intermediary—particularly vis-a-vis the United States—to be able to talk to all parties in the dispute, therefore making them a prominent player in any negotiations. ~~██████████~~ b3

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